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RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0383  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000279

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: AFRO-MAURITANIAN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ON THE  
RISE; AMBASSADOR'S TRIP TO NORTHERN SENEGAL PRAISED,  
QUESTIONED

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 87

[1](#)B. DAKAR 249

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, Reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- FLAM-Reform, a breakaway wing of the exiled  
Afro-Mauritanian opposition group FLAM, has called on the  
government to address the plight of the estimated 20,000  
Afro-Mauritanians refugees living in Senegal and Mali.

-- On the eve of Fal's March 6 visit to Dakar, a FLAM-Reform  
spokesman called on the transitional government to solve the  
refugee problem, saying that "Fal's transition will utterly  
fail if it does not tackle this question."

-- FLAM-Reform's actions are part of a larger trend of  
increased Afro-Mauritanian participation in the political  
process.

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(C) Comments  
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-- FLAM-Reform's decision to break away, to pursue active  
engagement in the Mauritanian political transition, and to  
call on the transitional government to organize the return of  
refugees came only two weeks after the Ambassador's fact  
finding trip to refugee camps in Northern Senegal (ref A).

-- The Ambassador's trip is still resonating, both in press  
coverage and discussions on the street, more than a month  
later. Afro-Mauritanians have expressed appreciation while  
the largely Arab-controlled press coverage have questioned  
the trip's motivations and either directly or indirectly  
accused the U.S. of hypocrisy in its position, noting its  
supposed past strong support of the Taya government -- the  
government responsible for the 1989 events and the ongoing  
refugee situation.

-- Soon after the Ambassador's trip, Afro-Mauritanian refugee  
leaders in Senegal sent a private message to Ambassador  
expressing their desire to collectively return to Mauritania

and to credit such a return to the Ambassador. The Ambassador sent a private reply that he did not want credit for such a return; instead he wanted the refugee leaders, and Afro-Mauritanians generally, to participate actively in the transition to democracy underway in Mauritania.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (U) A breakaway wing of the exiled Afro-Mauritanian opposition group, African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM), has called on the Mauritanian transitional government to address the plight of the estimated 20,000 Afro-Mauritanians refugees living in Senegal and Mali. The refugees fled south between 1989 and 1991 -- a period referred to as the 1989 events -- to escape ethnic violence.

¶2. (U) In advance of Fal's visit to Dakar March 6, the breakaway group -- FLAM-Reform -- held a press conference March 2 in which it called on the Mauritanian government to prepare an organized return for the remaining refugees, including remuneration and the return of lost lands. Responding to earlier statements made by Colonel Fal that the refugee issue should be resolved by the coming democratically elected government, FLAM-Reform spokesman Souleye Oumar Ba said "an exceptional problem such as this can be resolved only by a government of exception," adding that "Fal's transition will utterly fail if it does not tackle this question."

¶3. (U) According to Ba, FLAM-Reform decided to split from FLAM because many of its members believed the August 3 coup and subsequent election planning provided a real opportunity for change. He said that in contrast with FLAM's membership, FLAM-Reform members wanted to take an active role in the

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transition. Ba said the seeds for the split were planted at FLAM's sixth congress which took place in Cincinnati, Ohio in December 2005, when according to Ba many members started looking for "a more realistic approach" to engaging with the current government. Ba said that all opposition groups should participate in the transition, and called the current government's effort "a huge step forward," and said there was "a new climate, marked by freedom of expression, in Mauritania."

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A SIGN OF THE TIMES  
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¶4. (C) FLAM-Reform's actions are part of a larger trend of increased Afro-Mauritanian participation in the political process. Afro-Mauritanians -- which constitute more than a third of the population but have historically been excluded from positions of influence by the Arab-Moor power-base -- have begun forming political coalitions and developing platforms focusing on Afro-Mauritanian issues.

¶5. (C) At the same time, FLAM's split highlights the continued struggle of Afro-Mauritanian political actors to define themselves. These groups are constantly forming, splintering and in some cases dissolving. The political party coalition, Bloc for Change -- which includes two of the four government-recognized Afro-Mauritanian political parties -- has lost half of its parties, while the two main Afro-Mauritanian parties -- Popular Progressive Alliance and the Alliance for Justice and Democracy -- argue publicly over the best collective strategy for the Afro-Mauritanian community.

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VISIT TO CAMPS BOLSTERS AFRO-MAURITANIAN REFUGEE ISSUE  
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¶6. (C) The Ambassador's fact finding trip to refugee camps in Northern Senegal in late January (ref A) is still resonating,

both in press coverage and discussions on the street, more than a month later. Afro-Mauritanians expressed appreciation -- both in Senegal and Mauritania -- for the Ambassador's focus on the issue. In the March 7 edition of the afro-Mauritanian weekly "Le Renovateur", a reporter said many consider the Ambassador's trip to be the only positive step domestically or internationally toward resolving the refugee issues. However, the largely Arab-controlled press coverage questioned the trip's motivations and either directly or indirectly accused the U.S. of hypocrisy in its position, noting its supposed past strong support of the Taya government -- the government responsible for the 1989 events and the ongoing refugee situation.

17. (C) Following the Ambassador's trip, Afro-Mauritanian refugee leaders sent a private message to Ambassador expressing their desire to collectively return to Mauritania and to credit such a return to the Ambassador. The Ambassador sent a private reply that he did not want credit for such a return; instead he wanted the refugee leaders, and Afro-Mauritanians generally, to participate actively in the transition to democracy underway in Mauritania.  
LeBaron